

Agricultural heritage systems would not exist today without the contribution of family farmers



Interview with Mr. Moujahed Achouri, Director of FAO's Land and Water division

1. What are Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems?

GIAHS are built on local knowledge and experience, which reflect the evolution of humankind, the diversity of its knowledge, and its profound relationship with nature.

These systems have resulted not only in outstanding landscapes, maintenance and adaptation of agricultural biodiversity, indigenous knowledge and resilient ecosystems, but, above all, in the sustained provision of multiple goods and services, food and livelihood security for millions of local community members and indigenous peoples, well beyond their borders.

2. The IYFF has highlighted three key points which define why family farming is important. These include the crucial link with food security, the preservation of traditional food products, safeguarding of the world's agrobiodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the positive impact on local economies. Keeping these in mind, what are the links/overlaps between GIAHS and family farming?

There is much more than an overlap or link between GIAHS and family farming. GIAHS is synonymous with family farmers and small-scale farmers. Their important contribution to local and world food security, food sovereignty, indigenous food systems, nutritional diet and culture, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources fundamental to food and agriculture, correspond fully to the points mentioned above. Agricultural heritage systems would not exist today without the contribution of family farmers.

In the same way that GIAHS seeks to emphasise and promote the links between culture and agriculture, the IYFF seeks to define family farming as more than a mode of production but safeguard it as a way of life. Families, agriculture and culture are intimately connected. Protecting and promoting these links for future generations is a top priority for both GIAHS and the IYFF.

3. As custodians of biodiversity, what are the challenges faced by family farmers around the world today?

Challenges faced by family farmers include increasing vulnerability from an ever-narrowing diversity in the food basket, displacement of indigenous communities and dilution of traditional varieties, as well as low community involvement in decision-making. It is also worth mentioning that many policies are promoting standard staple crops while ignoring largely forgotten crops.

In addition to this, conservation efforts on biodiversity do not include the 'cultural and traditional knowledge systems' of family farmers and indigenous and local communities.

4. How does GIAHS benefit family farmers?

In order to maximise results, the GIAHS initiative intervenes at global, national and local levels. Family farmers and national governments are the main actors in the process with FAO acting exclusively as a facilitator.

The GIAHS partnership operates by emphasizing the delicate balance between conservation, adaptation and socio-economic development.

In order to conserve tradition, family farming communities also need to adapt. GIAHS supports protective government policies including new adaptation policies which take into consideration the challenges farmers face in light of climate change. Tailor-made solutions must be adopted so that techniques can be adapted to diverse conditions.

Capacity building of local farming communities, as well as local and national institutions, also focuses on finding solutions to increase farmers' income while adding economic value to the goods and services of these systems. Economic incentives must be put in place in order to stimulate local farmers to continue to maintain and protect these complex agricultural systems.

Moreover, GIAHS internationally recognizes family farmers reinforcing the sense of identity and pride that these communities should have in the central role they play in managing natural resources.

5. Could you describe two sites that define the synergies between family farming and GIAHS?

- The [Rice-Fish Culture in China](#) site creates awareness among farmers about their fish heritage culture, tradition and festivities and how to benefit from their heritage systems through converting conservation into marketable incomes; for example through increased labeling and branding and investing in agritourism and ecotourism.
- In the [Ifugao Rice Terraces in the Philippines](#) GIAHS have helped indigenous and local farming communities to valorize traditional knowledge and skills by putting the links between agriculture and culture into practice. The promotion of a community-based [GIAHS Open Air Museum](#) stimulates tourism and transfers

benefits to the local population. These efforts contribute significantly to conservation of Ifugao high altitude traditional rice cultivars and other associated forest biodiversity.

[More GIAHS sites](#)

6. How will GIAHS continue to support family farmers in the future?

FAO is now engaged in the process of formalizing international recognition of GIAHS, which will further strengthen the partnership.

Another excellent result for GIAHS comes with the establishment of NIAHS in China (Nationally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems). Before GIAHS, traditional farming systems in China were considered 'backward', now they have been pushed back into the spotlight and given the recognition they deserve. The ideal long-term outcome would be for more member countries to adopt and run GIAHS themselves.

Finally, future generations must be encouraged and closely monitored; the future of these unique agricultural systems is in their hands.

[More information on GIAHS](#)